

Symbols of the Easter Season



Butterfly

The butterfly symbolizes resurrection, new life, the glorified (changed, resurrected) body.



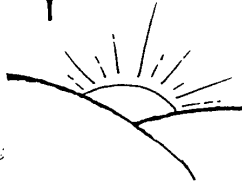
Chick, Egg, Lamb, Flowers

Each of these symbolizes new life. An egg looks lifeless but miraculously out of it comes new life. An egg can also represent the stone that was rolled away from the tomb.



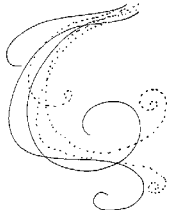
Lily

The lily is a sign of life coming from death as a bloom comes from a dry, seemingly lifeless bulb. The lily looks like a trumpet sounding the Good News of the Resurrection.



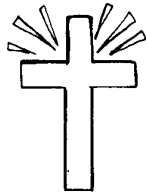
Sunrise

The women came to the tomb at sunrise on the first day of the week, and found that the tomb was empty, and that Jesus had risen. Sunrise can also symbolize resurrection as a new dawn in our own lives.



Wind

The coming of the Holy Spirit on the disciples at the Pentecost festival is described as a noise from the sky like a strong wind blowing.



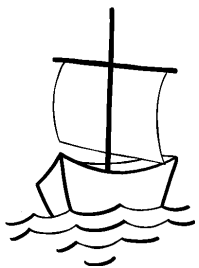
Cross of Glory

The cross with rays symbolizes the glory of the Risen Christ.



Tongues of Fire

In Acts, the coming of the Holy Spirit is described as tongues of fire spreading out and touching each one in the room. Fire is a symbol used in Hebrew Scriptures to represent God.



Ship

Symbol for the church, which was given birth at Pentecost. The large assembly part of a church building is called the "nave" which means ship. The church is seen as the means by which we journey together in faith on the sea of life. The wind of the Spirit fills the sails of our ship.



April	24	Go and Tell (Easter Sunday)
May	1	Breath of Hope
	8	In Our Midst (Christian Family Sunday)
	15	Day by Day
	22	Stone upon Stone
	29	Comfort and Assurance (Christian Family Sunday)
June	5	A New Way
	12	Open to the Spirit (Pentecost)

During this Easter season our theme is "Winds of Hope." Throughout the Great 50 Days of Easter, we will be hearing stories of how Jesus' followers inspired by hope and new life through his resurrection, continue to live and grow as a community. We will learn the story of the empty tomb and how the first witnesses to the resurrection were inspired to go and tell what had happened. The disciples are filled with a breath of hope, learn to find the presence of the Risen Christ in their midst, and come to understand that Jesus had been among them, caring and nurturing them like a good shepherd. At the end of the Easter season, we will spend time with the disciples wondering what will happen next, and then find new ways to be open to the Spirit on Pentecost.

The energies of wind and fire combine in our Unit logo to create a sense of the movement of the Spirit and the exhilaration felt by the witnesses of the resurrection and members of the early church. The three flaming figures at the center seem to be dancing, praising, opening themselves up with joy to whatever God's winds of hope may bring. The three figures can be seen to represent the tongues of fire at Pentecost, the new community that was born, as well as the mystery of the triune God. We, too, are invited to live out the spirit of hope and joy of this great Easter season.

A Word about the At Home Leaflet...

The *At Home Leaflet* is designed to help you continue what you may have begun in church as you discuss and learn and live your faith together as a family. The *At Home Leaflet* will also help you prepare for worship or adult study. The Bible passages on which children's lessons are based are marked with an asterisk. Faith-sharing ideas are suggestions for you and your family—use the ones that suit your family best. In the process, you may discover other meaningful rituals or activities.

Finally, it is here. Easter Day is the most important day of the year for Christians. And Easter is not just a day but a whole season of celebrating. After 40 days of Lent in preparation and anticipation, the Easter season begins with the Festival of the Resurrection on Easter Sunday morning. We gather to celebrate the joy of God's new life, the vindication of Jesus' ministry, and the new community that was called into being by this astonishing event. The colours for this festive season are white or gold/yellow, to denote the joy of newness of life we receive from God.

Easter lasts for 50 days, and so we name the Sundays in the season as Sundays of Easter, rather than Sundays after. For 50 days we gather to hear stories of the Risen Christ. For 50 days we gather to be revitalized by remembering the growth and the struggles of the early church. For 50 days we gather to reflect again on the impact this joyous news has on our lives, and our life together. Such an all-embracing task needs a full season of celebration.

We must not allow the rich imagery and liturgy of Lent to overshadow the joy of the Easter season. Lenten devotions can consume so much energy and creativity that by the time we finally arrive at the season we have been anticipating we may find ourselves celebrating Easter Day, and then looking forward to the end of the year! The challenge is to make our celebrations of God's new life as rich and compelling as the time of anticipation has been.

During this season of the year readings from the Hebrew Scripture are set aside, and we read instead from the Book of Acts, Luke's account of the beginnings of the church. These may sometimes present an idealized portrait, but the vigour and commitment of the first Christians is inspiring, and the issues their communities faced are not always different from the challenges facing us. The second readings are drawn from 1 Peter, which urges its readers to live their lives faithfully, remembering that "we have been born anew to a living hope" (1:3). The gospel readings at first highlight appearances of the Risen Christ, and then move to passages from John's gospel that are intended to help us reflect on the Spirit-filled life of the church. Throughout all of this the winds of the Spirit blow hope, passion, and exhilaration through the church then and now.

The Feast of Pentecost

The Easter season closes with the Feast of Pentecost, at which we recognize and give thanks for God's gift of the Spirit to the Church. The colour for the day is red, to remind us of the tongues of flames in the story of Acts 2.

The name for this feast comes from the Greek word for 50 and the name for the Jewish Festival of Weeks, a harvest festival that was celebrated 50 days after Passover. It was a time to give thanks to God for the first wheat harvest of the year, and to offer back in thanksgiving the first fruits of the earth. The people who heard Peter's sermon in Luke's account in the Book of Acts had gathered in Jerusalem for this celebration.

Christians appropriated both the festival and its timing. What better way to recognize the gift of the Holy Spirit, and all that changed because of it, than to do so on a festival of first fruits. Indeed the first fruits of the resurrection were the thousands who were added to the community that day.

The account in Acts is not the only place we read of the gift of the Spirit to the church, and not all authors set this gift on this day. In John, for example, it comes earlier, and we will read that account too today. Other New Testament authors describe the gift in different ways, but all are agreed on this: Jesus is risen, and God is at work among us and in the world with a power that is relentless and unstoppable.

Ongoing Activity through Unit VI

This year, we focus on building a new life, inspired by "Winds of Hope." Nursery and Beginner children have a celebratory Easter Hanging that they add to each week. The primary class may choose to work on an ongoing bulletin board project, adding pictures, words and symbols throughout the season. Juniors may choose to create a banner that they add to each week. Through the gradual construction of these wall hangings, the children will be encouraged to understand new life—resurrected life—as a growing, flowering and always-moving process which begins at the empty tomb and continues on into our own lives today. The lengthy Easter season is intended to set a tone and provide a flavor for the rest of the Christian Year. The ongoing presence of these wall hangings in church classrooms will help to underscore the church's identity as the community devoted to new, resurrected life.



Open to the Spirit (Pentecost)

Numbers 11:24-30
Psalm 104:24-34, 35b
Acts 2:1-21*
John 20:19-23

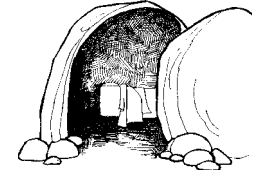
Background: In today’s scripture passages we see that the Spirit is not predictable, and yet there is joy and celebration in the power that transforms. In the Acts passage we meet the disciples gathered to celebrate the Jewish festival of thanksgiving for the first harvest, called Pentecost. The Spirit of God came among them like tongues of fire and a crashing wind, and they burst out of the room into the marketplace speaking with such passion and energy that thousands were moved to join them. The gospel from John is another account of the disciples receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Risen Christ breathes into them the Spirit and they are energized and given both the power and the courage to continue Jesus’ ministry, even to the point of forgiving sin. The psalm is a marvelous celebration of the boundless power of God. All things, the great and the small, the gentle and the strong, are dependent on God for their life and well-being. Numbers tells of 70 elders who received the Spirit of God and began to prophesy ecstatically. The Spirit has been loosed upon the disciples of every culture and generation to bring courage, hope, passion and truth to a world starving for something strong enough to believe in.

Faith Sharing

1. Read the story “Birthday of the Church” from *The Family Story Bible*, p. 269. Talk about your church. I wonder what helps you feel that you belong? I wonder what your church does that the early church did also?
2. Celebrate Pentecost with this prayer:
We celebrate the Spirit (*raise your arms*)
within us (*hug yourself*)
and among us! (*extend your arms*)
We go into the world (*make a large circle with your arms*)
carried by the wind of God, (*sway your arms over your head*)
fueled by the fire of God. (*wiggle your fingers in front of you*)
We go in love. (*place hands over your heart*) Amen.
3. Bake a birthday cake with young children. Decorate it with red icing (to represent the tongues of flames in the story of Acts 2). Sing “Happy Birthday” to our church and invite children to blow out the candles.

Go And Tell (Easter Day)

Acts 10:34-43
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
Colossians 3:1-4
Matthew 28:1-10*



Aim: To experience the wonder of what God has done.

Background: Christians have never been able to stay silent about this most central event of our faith. Whether it is the women at the tomb telling the disciples, Peter telling Cornelius, or Matthew speaking to his congregation and to us, the disciples have found themselves so filled with excitement and wonder at Jesus’ resurrection that it has given them new voice, and the courage to go and tell others. In Acts, Peter understands for the first time that the gospel is for everyone, not simply for Jews. In the Psalm, the verse about the stone that the builders rejected becoming the cornerstone (v. 22) is quoted several times in the New Testament as a way of describing what God has done through Jesus. It is even more important to us when we remember that this is not simply something God did once, in Jesus’ resurrection—it is the way God works in the world. People throughout our history have seen this and rejoiced in it. The resurrection is a new act of creation, in which the past is finished and gone, and everything is fresh and new.

Faith Sharing

1. Read the story “Mary of Magdala Sees Jesus” from *The Family Story Bible*, p. 258. Talk about how Mary’s feelings changed from sadness to joy. Provide shawls, scarves, towels, bathrobes etc. and invite children to dress as people did in Jesus’ time. Read the story again and encourage the children to respond dramatically.
2. Recall that on Easter Sunday, people in churches around the world greet each other with this familiar Easter Acclamation:
One: Alleluia! Christ is risen.
All: Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!
Your family might begin greet one another this way throughout this Easter Season. (Remember Easter is more than Easter Sunday—it’s a 50-day celebration!)
3. Dye Easter eggs (dip hard-boiled eggs in hot water to which food coloring and a Tbsp. of vinegar has been added). You might gently draw Easter symbols with wax crayons before placing them in the dye (the wax will resist the dye). Remember that eggs remind us of the rock that was rolled away from the tomb and of new life.

Breath of Hope

Acts 2:14a, 22-32
 Psalm 16
 1 Peter 1:3-9
 John 20:19-31*



Aim: To explore ways we can experience God’s spirit.

Background: The resurrection of Jesus is more than an event that happened a long time ago. Our lessons today describe some of the impact it had on the early church. We hear the Spirit speaking through an early sermon in Acts, we find a community empowered by an indescribable hope, and we see the disciples receiving the Holy Spirit. All ages focus on John’s version of what happened at Pentecost. Just as God breathed into Adam’s nostrils in Creation, so now the Risen Christ breathes the Holy Spirit into the disciples. It is the gift which he promised them before he died (see John 14:15-31). The apostles are challenged to pick up where Jesus has left off, forgiving others and calling people into new relationship with God, inspired by the breath of hope. As we read we may ask ourselves how we are like the earliest disciples, and whether our communities encounter the Holy Spirit in similar ways. How do we experience the Spirit challenging and comforting us? The promise of God is that we are not alone, either to suffer or to celebrate. We can look to the Spirit to embrace us, and to empower us to carry on Jesus’ ministry of hope for the world.

Faith Sharing

1. As a family, read and talk about today’s key verse (Psalm 16:11a). On a large sheet of paper, print the verse and draw a pathway. Invite everyone to write or draw pictures of how God leads them to life and what gives them joy. Young children can add joyful colors and decorations. Mount the picture where it will be seen daily as a reminder of God’s presence in your lives.
2. Read “Thomas Asks Questions” from The Family Story Bible, p. 264. Talk about the story together. What questions would each of you have for Jesus? I wonder how Jesus answers our questions today?
3. Blow bubbles together as a symbol of God’s breath of the Spirit. If you don’t have bubble soap gently mix together: 1/2 cup (125mL) liquid dishwashing detergent (e.g. Dawn), 1-2 Tbsp. (15-30mL) glycerine (optional), 5 cups (1.4 litres) clean cold water (on very dry days add more). Try not to create any froth on the top because it tends to break the bubbles. We can’t see the air we blow into the soap, but we know it’s inside the bubbles. We can’t see God’s Spirit, but we know God’s Spirit is with us!

A New Way

Acts 1:6-14*
 Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35
 1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11
 John 17:1-11



Aim: To wonder with the disciples about what’s next.

Background: All ages focus today on the first story in the book the Acts of the Apostles: Jesus’ ascension into heaven. Jesus tells his disciples that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them and that they will tell everyone what has happened. The disciples must have been filled with wonder and curiosity about what lay ahead of them, but also some worry and anxiety, too. The psalm was chosen to accompany today’s lesson from Acts because God is portrayed as one “who rides upon the clouds.” God’s triumph over the enemies of life heralds a new way for us all. In 1 Peter the writer urges the faithful to stay alert. Trials and deprivations are everywhere, but the faithful can be assured that God has called them for a purpose and will “restore, support, strengthen and establish” them (5:10). In John’s gospel, we hear Jesus’ final prayer when he asks God to protect his followers and keep them unified. The disciples are about to start on a new way, without Jesus to guide them. We also wonder about what will happen next as we seek to follow Christ in new ways just as the first disciples did.

Faith Sharing

1. Do as Jesus said and “go out and tell the world about him.” Use sidewalk chalk to announce the good news to everyone who passes by your church and/or home. Have children write Easter messages and draw pictures that celebrate our hope and faith in the Risen Christ.
2. Invite everyone to meditate on or share aloud anything that might be troubling them at this time. Light a candle and offer your worries in prayer to God.
3. Sometimes there are clear marks of transition in our lives, such as when a loved one dies or we move to a new home or city. At such times we often wonder what will happen next. For the disciples, Jesus’ ascension was one of those clear marks as they prepared for life in a new way. Talk about the transition times in your family. If you have family pictures, look at them to remind you of those times when you felt both excited and unsure of what was next. What helped you move on?

Comfort and Assurance (Christian Family Sunday)

Acts 17:22-31
 Psalm 66:8-20
 1 Peter 3:13-22
 John 14:15-21*



Aim: To hear that God will never leave us.

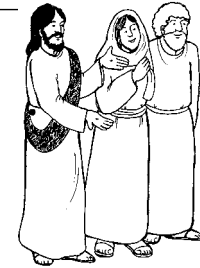
Background: The winds of hope blow strong through today’s readings. We hear Paul proclaiming that God infuses everything such that even people who know nothing of our story can know something of our God. We have the assurance that God is never far from us, for we are *in* God, as a baby lives and moves in its mother’s womb. The psalmist offers thanksgiving to God who has stayed with the people through everything. The timeless question of where suffering comes from rises up in this psalm, and while the writer believes that God causes the trials of life, what is important is the recognition that God never leaves us; indeed, God accompanies us through our suffering. The writer of 1 Peter offers advice to Christians who are suffering and persecuted. Jesus’ resurrection is a sign of assurance that God is with the people and knows what they experience. All ages focus on the reading from Acts where Jesus tells the disciples that he will not leave them orphaned. The Spirit will live in all who love Jesus and keep his commandments (John 14:15-16). We hear again that God will never leave us because God is within us and we are within God.

Faith Sharing

1. Talk with young children about how a favourite toy or blanket makes them feel. Help them create a space where they can go to feel secure and comforted. Cut doors and windows into a refrigerator box, cover a table with sheets (use clothespins to hold them together), or simply choose a corner of a room for this special space. Make it inviting with pillows, blankets, stuffed toys, a CD player and soothing music—and anything else the children suggest. Encourage children to go to their special space whenever they want to be quiet and feel close to God.
2. Take a moment at prayer time tonight to think about how God’s spirit is at work in you. How has God’s spirit been blowing through your life like “winds of hope” today?
3. Talk with your family about the “House Churches” of the early Christians and what it would be like to meet in people’s homes rather than in a church building like we have today. Read the story “Sharing” on pg. 271 of the *Family Story Bible*.

In Our Midst (Christian Family Sunday)

Acts 2:14a, 36-41
 Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19
 1 Peter 1:17-23
 Luke 24:13-35*

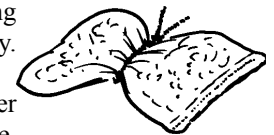


Aim: To share stories about responding to Jesus.

Background: Today’s lessons invite us to reflect on stories about recognizing and responding to Christ in our midst. We see how Peter’s sermon at Pentecost compelled the crowd to ask questions, debate with him, and in the end 3,000 chose to be baptized! The psalm is chosen to show how appropriate it is for us to give thanks at the end of a long illness or when something wondrous happens. The author of 1 Peter sees Jesus’ sacrifice as providing a sign and seal upon the relationship between God and people. Because of this sacrifice we can trust in God as the one who resurrects, rather than live in fear of the God who judges impartially, and without compassion. The gospel reading from Luke is the familiar story of the disciples who meet the Risen Christ on the Emmaus road. All ages focus on how Cleopas and another disciple (probably his wife Mary) recognize Jesus when they “break bread” with him. How do we recognize the Risen Christ among us? Might Christ speak to us through the stranger on the road? through discussion over the scriptures? through the breaking of bread? Might Christ speak in a wondrous healing? an unfamiliar image? a powerful moving event? And when we have that kind of incredible moment of recognition in the midst of experiences like these, can we find the courage to speak of it to others as Cleopas and his companion did?

Faith Sharing

1. Read “On the Road to Emmaus” from The Family Story Bible, p. 260. You might have a simple meal of bread and grape juice. Say a prayer before you “break bread together” asking God to help you recognize the Risen Christ among you.
2. Share your experiences of times when a “stranger” helped you in some way. What did it feel like? Talk about times when you were the helpful “stranger.” What do these experiences tell you about the Risen Christ who is active in the world today?
3. Continue to celebrate the Season of Easter by making butterflies—a wondrous symbol of resurrection and beauty. Loosely stuff Ziploc bags with colorful scraps of paper, fabric, ribbon and/or yarn. Wind a brown or black pipe cleaner around the center, leaving the ends to stand up as antennae. Place several of these in a basket for the table or hang them from a hanger with yarn to make a mobile.
4. Talk about today being Christian Family Sunday and about ways the church is like family to you. Talk about how Communion is the special meal of the Christian family and link it to the story of Cleopas and Mary.



Day by Day

Acts 2:42-47
 Psalm 23*
 1 Peter 2:19-25
 John 10:1-10



Aim: To explore the 23rd Psalm as Easter people.

Background: All ages are focusing on Psalm 23 which so beautifully describes the relationship with God that we all hope for. We are assured that with God we can enjoy the richness and abundance of a feast even in the midst of enemies (whether they be people or forces that diminish life, like greed, jealousy or shame). In Acts we get a snapshot of life as it was in the early church. The vision of the reign of God so captured them that they were willing to make enormous changes in their lives, as well as in their belief systems. 1 Peter is a reflection on suffering. For Peter's community, suffering is way of life: slaves suffer at the hands of their masters, and Christians suffer for their way of life at the hands of those who are suspicious or afraid of them. The author assures us that God the Good Shepherd will not let our suffering be in vain. The reading from John speaks of the promise of abundant life offered to those who follow Jesus. Whether Jesus is the shepherd who leads us there, or the gate through which we pass to find it, the promise of green pastures and still waters is held out to all who follow him.

Faith Sharing

1. What sources of comfort and care do you have in your community? Say a prayer for the “shepherds” in your community—those who bring comfort and love to others in need.
2. Read Acts 2:42-47 together. Jesus invites us to shepherd one another. Consider what you might do to show love and care for someone who is vulnerable. You might have a meal with a refugee family sponsored by a church in your community, for example. Or think of someone who would appreciate a telephone call, a visit, a letter, a 3-day casserole etc.
3. We can celebrate the promise of green pastures and a life without want. We can celebrate Jesus who comes to bring life in all its fullness. Have a special meal or family outing to celebrate that God is with us not just once in a while, but day to day!

Stone by Stone

Acts 7:55-60*
 Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16
 1 Peter 2:2-10
 John 14:1-14



Aim: To learn about the building up of the early church.

Background: The resurrection of Jesus and the birth of the early church were important and exciting. Yet those early years were also times of great turmoil for the first Christians. This is evident in the story of the stoning of Stephen, the first martyr of the infant church. As members of the church fled persecution, they took the gospel with them and preached it wherever they found themselves. Ironically, the gospel spread because of the persecution of early believers. The psalmist's plea for God's protection could well have been Stephen's own cry. Indeed, it is the cry of many throughout history who faced hardship and abuse because of their religious beliefs. Here God is portrayed as a “rock of refuge” and the psalmist trusts in God's deliverance. 1 Peter was written for people who were experiencing great trials, sometimes even death, because of their beliefs. They were trying to explore their identity as members of a new religious group and were assured that they were a holy nation, God's people. In John's gospel, Jesus prepares his followers for his death by giving them words of hope. Knowing that Jesus had gone on ahead of them, and that the same Spirit that was in Jesus was with them, helped the early church to persevere.

Faith Sharing

1. Encourage everyone to write (or make pictures) of messages that will “build up” your family community. You might affirm each other's gifts, express appreciation for caring words or actions, write prayers on each other's behalf etc. It would be fun to place the messages in surprising places, e.g. inside shoes, under dinner plates, in coat pockets, lunch bags etc.
2. Gather together a variety of stones and a magnifying glass if possible. Look at each stone and talk about what makes them similar and what makes them different. Talk about how the church is made up of individuals with similarities and differences too.
4. Read “The Story of Stephen” from *The Family Story Bible*, p. 272. Try to imagine how courageous Stephen was to stand up to the rulers. Talk about other people you know who have shown courage (start with your own family and move out to include extended family, church, local community and the world). Remember these people in your prayers this coming week.